

Probation Officer
Work Activities and Competencies

From Board of Corrections Multi-Jurisdictional Job Analysis Research 2002

Introduction

The following work activities and competencies were identified as major job dimensions of the majority of probation officers who work in county probation departments throughout the State of California. Part 1. consists of 10 major work activities of a probation officer followed by sample tasks that relate to each activity. Part 2. consists of 24 competencies identified as important for effective performance of the work activities. This information may be of use to local jurisdictions in the selection, training and performance evaluation of their probation officers.

Since this research is based on the elements most common to multiple jurisdictions throughout the state, these work activities and competencies may differ in your jurisdiction. Therefore, each county should compare their specific operations with those reflected in the statewide research. For more in-depth information about the job analysis research, please refer to the Job Analysis Report for Probation Officer – 2002.

For questions or more information, please contact the Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) Division of the Board of Corrections, (916) 445-5073.

PART 1. WORK ACTIVITIES

Work Activity 1

Monitoring and Enforcing Compliance

Monitoring probationers' adherence to the terms of probation, detecting violations, and enforcing compliance. Reviewing relevant probation conditions, such as employment, residence, treatment, payments, etc. Contacting probationers with appropriate frequency, including home or school visits, drug tests, etc. Conducting regular and thorough discussions with parents, relatives, school officials, etc., to check on probationers' conduct and compliance. Setting goals for probationers' treatment or conduct, and monitoring progress. Being alert to signs of problems, anticipating and preventing such problems when possible.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Interview probationer to determine progress toward treatment goals and compliance with terms of probation.
 - Interview parents, relatives, school officials, employers, and/or others in probation officer's office or over the phone to check on probationer's conduct and compliance with terms and conditions of probation.
 - Visit the home, neighborhood, school, and/or work place of probationer to check on the individual's conduct and compliance with terms and conditions of probation or wardship.
 - Search probationer's person, personal property, residence, or automobile per Court Order.
 - Collect and preserve evidence.
 - Review report forms or other written reports submitted by probationers to check place of residence, employment, probationary payments (fines, restitution, or support), and arrests in the preceding month.
 - Conduct drug/alcohol test.
 - Check for physical signs of drug or alcohol abuse by probationer.
 - Obtain progress reports (orally or in writing) from referral sources (treatment, educational, employment, or training programs) working with a probationer.
 - Evaluate extent to which probationer is making satisfactory progress towards goals and complying with probation conditions.
 - Arrest probationers who violate the law or conditions of probation.
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Work Activity 2

Investigating

Gathering and learning all relevant case and background information. Obtaining and reviewing appropriate department records, probation files, District Attorney's files, rap sheets, Juvenile Hall logs, police reports, chronological records, etc. Gaining a working knowledge of information in all probationers' files and living situation, including the nature of offenses, prior criminal records, family living situation, and evidence of quality of environment.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Review police reports of charges against a juvenile who has been cited or taken into custody.
 - Check probation files and/or contact assigned Probation Officer to obtain details of any prior contact a juvenile has had with Probation Department.
 - Check juvenile's prior arrest record and/or police contacts.
 - Review District Attorney's file, court referrals, police report, plea agreement or jury verdict, and/or any other paperwork pertaining to the current offense.
 - Review CII rap sheet, FBI rap sheet, Department of Motor Vehicles printout, probation file, and/or other records pertaining to prior criminal record.
 - Obtain juvenile/adult or parent release for medical, psychiatric, or other information.
 - Assess complaints of child neglect/abuse, refer complaints and file appropriate notifications under the law.
 - Investigate private placements available (e.g., group homes, foster homes, relatives, treatment centers) for juveniles/adults.
 - Review probationer's file to become familiar with the nature of the offense, prior record, and individual's social, educational, and employment history.
 - Review case file to prepare for appearance in court at case hearing.
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Work Activity 3

Analyzing and Making Recommendations

Synthesizing and evaluating all relevant information in reaching decisions and recommendations. Making appropriate decisions and recommendations regarding detention, placement, sentencing, payments, terms and conditions of probation, degree of monitoring and supervision required, and release/revocation. Giving appropriate weight and consideration to all relevant factors in reaching conclusions.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Decide whether to close the case; release the juvenile on promise to appear in court; handle informally or detain.
 - Evaluate the seriousness of a violation of probation and decide whether to file charges.
 - Read Penal Code and review sentencing manual to determine aggravating and mitigating circumstances of the crime.
 - Synthesize and evaluate information gathered, to decide which facts of the case represent aggravating or mitigating circumstances of the crime.
 - Synthesize and evaluate information gathered, to make a recommendation of fitness for juvenile court.
 - Synthesize and evaluate information gathered, to decide on recommended disposition, sentence and/or terms and conditions of probation.
 - Determine the frequency of contact needed during supervision, taking into account the risk involved and the needs of the probationer.
 - Prepare case plan and set goals for treatment or probationer's conduct under supervision (e.g., develop a treatment plan, supervision plan).
 - Determine officer safety issues and develop plan for contact, search, arrest, seizure of evidence, etc.
 - Determine whether to recommend revocation, modification, or termination of probation.
 - Prepare report giving recommendation to detain or release juvenile and rationale for recommendation.
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Work Activity 4

Report Writing and Documentation

Writing reports (e.g., detention, fitness, pre-sentence, disposition), correspondence and other documents/reports related to intake, progress, detention/release, etc., that are clear complete, accurate and concise. Adhering to legal and departmental guidelines regarding all paperwork and documentation requirements. Keeping appropriate and accurate records of field and other work activities.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Prepare necessary paperwork for District Attorney to use in filing Juvenile Court petition in law violation cases.
 - Set up information on probationer (e.g., court orders, address, phone) for Field Contact Notebook.
 - Prepare juvenile intake report (i.e., report prepared at time of booking).
 - Prepare detention report for use at detention hearing.
 - Prepare fitness report for juveniles over the age of 14 charged with violations of criminal record.
 - Prepare pre-sentence, disposition, or pre-plea report to Superior Court.
 - Prepare supplemental report on progress of probationer (e.g., results of professional evaluation, semi-annual review, updates).
 - Prepare affidavit/petition/probation violation/modification notice.
 - Prepare memorandum to the court.
 - Prepare court documents for Judge's signature (e.g., arrest warrants, terms and conditions of probation, ex-parte orders).
 - Maintain field book information/documentation.
 - Write case notes in probation file or keep chronological reports about probationer.
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Work Activity 5

Handling Emergencies

Working effectively and taking appropriate actions in emergency or crisis situations (e.g., injuries, escapes, fires, physical fights or attacks upon staff). Using sound judgment and following proper procedures in using physical force or restraints, enlisting and providing appropriate assistance; and rendering appropriate first aid. This includes demonstrated performance in job simulation exercises and drills. Note: the focus of this work activity is on judgment and following procedures. Physical ability is not included here (it is to be described later in a separate work activity).

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Evacuate individuals from an area or facility (e.g., in fire drill or real emergency).
 - Perform CPR.
 - Render first aid other than CPR.
 - Verbally intervene in potentially violent interpersonal situations.
 - Physically subdue a resisting or fleeing probationer, with the help of others.
 - Defend oneself or others using less lethal force (e.g., OC spray, baton).
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Work Activity 6

Interacting/Communicating with Probationers

Clearly conveying the terms of probation to probationers, including their rights, responsibilities, the nature of probation violations, and the consequences for committing violations. Gaining probationers' cooperation and respect through professionalism, answering questions, providing support and counseling, and offering guidance as appropriate regarding meeting the conditions of probation (e.g., school attendance, urinalysis testing, employment, housing, transportation, treatment, payment schedules, etc.).

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Conduct intake or pre-plea/pre-sentence interview with adult or juvenile.
 - Interview juvenile/adult and/or co-defendants to get their description of the offense and background information.
 - Review terms and conditions of probation with probationer and/or family.
 - Interview new probationer to assess his/her needs.
 - Interview new probationer to assess the risk he/she poses to the community.
 - Advise probationer and/or victim of their right to a restitution hearing.
 - Respond to questions from probationer in person or over the telephone.
 - Advise minor of constitutional rights (e.g., right to make phone calls) upon booking in Juvenile Hall.
 - Advise juvenile status offender (601) or law violator (602) of his/her constitutional rights or Miranda warnings, and ensure juvenile understands rights.
 - Interview juvenile to obtain background information and information about the offense.
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Work Activity 7

Interacting/Communicating with Non-Probationers

Appropriately and effectively working with affected parties such as parents/guardians, victims, witnesses, employers, teachers, etc. Interviewing family, school officials, etc., regarding probationers' history, character, and conduct. Providing all necessary information to affected parties regarding court or hearing dates and relevant legal procedures, in a timely and effective manner. Providing warnings to others of potential problems, threats, or dangers. Counseling and assisting victims and family members as appropriate.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Contact parent, guardian, or responsible relative to notify them that juvenile is in custody.
 - Interview parent or other adult associated with juvenile, school, victim, witness, to obtain background information and information about the offense.
 - Inform all relevant parties (e.g., juvenile, parent, attorney) of date of detention hearing; ensure juvenile and parent agree to appear at hearing.
 - Interview members of juvenile's/adult's immediate family, relatives, neighbors, employers, school officials, character references, and others about the social, educational, work history and adjustment of the juvenile/adult.
 - Notify victim as required by law.
 - Interview victims to get their descriptions of the offense and obtain a victim impact statement; notify them of their right to appear in court.
 - Advise victims of services available (e.g., counseling).
 - Contact victim(s) and ask them to detail their losses and estimate the dollar value of the loss.
 - Notify anyone who is the specific object of threats by a probationer.
 - Respond to general questions from citizens – in person, over the telephone, or in writing.
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Work Activity 8

Working with Probation Staff and Other Agencies

Working effectively and professionally with co-workers and with external departments, agencies, and institutions. Informing police of law violations by probationers and assisting in their investigations. Keeping law enforcement, other probation officers, and other correctional and governmental agencies informed when necessary. Referring probationers to medical, mental health, social service, and educational institutions, as needed.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Advise institutional staff of any detention problem.
 - Contact police agency to obtain police report.
 - Refer probationer to appropriate program or agency.
 - Participate in joint operations with other law enforcement/corrections agencies (e.g., gang task force).
 - Give assignments and/or instructions to other probation officers, probation assistants, aides, other Probation Department personnel, students, or volunteers.
 - Consult or share information with co-workers and/or supervisors (e.g., discuss recommended dispositions, treatment plans, appropriate referrals).
 - Maintain current knowledge of departmental policies and procedures (e.g., attend training, review memos).
 - Maintain current knowledge of areas of personal, agency, or county legal liability (e.g., attend training, read legal memos).
 - Attend training courses or seminars offered by the department or outside the department.
 - Refer complaints of suspected elder abuse and file appropriate notifications under the law.
 - Refer complaints of suspected domestic violence to proper agencies for assistance.
 - Refer calls from media to agency Public Information Officer (PIO) or designated contact person and/or alert PIO to sensitive issues.
 - Consult or share information important to officer safety/debriefing of critical incidents with co-workers and supervisors.
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Work Activity 9

Working with the Justice System

Filing accurate, complete, and timely legal reports, affidavits, warrant requests, petitions, memoranda, etc., with the courts. Adhering to filing and court appearance procedures and deadlines. Demonstrating professionalism and effectiveness in providing testimony, participating in detention hearings, recommending sentencing, and in all other interactions with judges, the District Attorney's office, and defense attorneys. Maintaining cooperative relationships with attorneys, judges, and court staff. Maintaining current knowledge of case law and sentencing precedents.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Determine filing deadlines and court appearance deadlines.
 - At detention hearing, present recommendation to detain or release juvenile and recommendation as to how case should be handled.
 - Request warrant from court on missing probationer.
 - File petition or request that petition be filed to initiate court process when probationer violates terms of probation or commits a new offense.
 - Initiate procedures to request Interstate Compact Supervision for probationers wishing to leave the state permanently.
 - Prepare and submit a request for petition to the District Attorney.
 - Appear in court and answer questions about case.
 - Testify at hearing, deposition, or in court as a witness.
 - Assist with special projects, studies, and investigations ordered by the court.
 - When court ordered, gather information and update the court orally on status of a probation case.
 - Provide sentencing/dispositional consultations to the judiciary on a specific probation case.
 - Maintain current knowledge of case law and sentencing precedents (e.g., attend training, supervisor instructions, review legal update memos).
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Work Activity 10

Performing Physically Demanding Work

Working with physical skill sufficient to handle emergency situations such as medical emergencies, defending one self, and pursuing, disarming, subduing and restraining probationers. This includes demonstrated performance in job simulation exercises and drills.

Example Job Tasks: (Note: Work activity is not limited to these examples.)

- Run for a short distance (e.g., to obtain protective cover).
 - Bend, extend, and/or twist body (e.g., when searching vehicles and/or placing physical restraints on individuals).
 - Physically restrain physically acting-out probationer or other individual.
 - Physically subdue a resisting or fleeing probationer, with the help of others.
 - Handcuff a resisting person.
 - Put an actively resisting person in the seat of a car.
 - Physically defend self or others (i.e., with hands, arms or feet) against an attacking probationer or other individual.
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PART 2. COMPETENCIES

1. **Oral Communication.** Speaks in a clear and understandable manner, and comprehends various types of information received orally (e.g., procedures, instructions, descriptions).
2. **Written Communication.** Writes in a clear and understandable manner, using correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation to produce documents that are organized, complete, and accurate.
3. **Problem Solving.** Analyzes, evaluates, and combines information to arrive at correct conclusions. Makes sound judgments regarding the accuracy of information, and applies rules and procedures to come up with logical answers and determine appropriate priorities.
4. **Vigilance.** Remains alert and focused during periods of slow or repetitive work activity (e.g., monitoring). Concentrates on tasks and is not easily distracted.
5. **Accuracy with Written Information.** Accurately reviews, identifies, and verifies detailed visual information (e.g., checking names, numbers, codes, pictures) in a timely manner.
6. **Multi-tasking.** Quickly and accurately performs multiple tasks at the same time, in order of importance, shifting back and forth between tasks and/or sources of information.
7. **Retention of Information.** Retains and recalls important job information such as procedures, rules, people, and events.
8. **Assertiveness.** Takes charge of situations and groups, influences and motivates others; speaks up, is candid, and confronts people when necessary, without hesitation.
9. **Emotional Control.** Remains calm and in control, and does not overreact or express negative emotions (e.g., anger) in adverse, stressful, life-threatening, or time-critical situations.
10. **Stress Tolerance.** Performs effectively under stressful conditions and copes with prolonged exposure to job stressors (e.g., time pressure, emergencies, threats, physical altercations).
11. **Attention to Detail.** Is thorough and carries out tasks with a concern for the inclusion and correctness of details.
12. **Self-Assurance.** Interacts confidently with individuals and groups at all levels; is not easily fooled or persuaded into changing course of action.
13. **Decisiveness.** Makes well-reasoned decisions in a timely manner, sometimes in situations where there are no standard procedures.
14. **Agreeableness.** Is courteous, cooperative, tactful, patient and friendly to others (e.g., co-workers, supervisors, and the public).
15. **Adaptability.** Adapts to unanticipated problems and conflicts; accepts changes (e.g., assignments or procedures); and changes roles based on requirements of the situation.

16. **Positive Attitude.** Demonstrates a positive, upbeat attitude when interacting with others; is not overly cynical, suspicious or distrustful of others; displays an interest and enjoyment in the job by putting energy into work; accepts constructive criticism.
17. **Teamwork.** Establishes and maintains effective working relationships with others; shares information, provides assistance, puts group goals ahead of personal goals and does fair share in a group effort; and does not allow personal differences to affect working relationships.
18. **Dependability.** Is reliable (e.g., maintains punctual, reliable attendance); takes ownership for work performed and ensures work is completed accurately and on time.
19. **Job Safety.** Proceeds in a careful, cautious, and prudent manner in performing job duties.
20. **Integrity.** Is fair, honest, impartial, and straightforward in dealing with others; honors commitments; is trustworthy; takes responsibility for failures and shares credit for successes; uses appropriate discretion and is sensitive to confidentiality; and demonstrates high ethical standards.
21. **Conformance to Rules and Regulations.** Performs work in compliance with laws, rules and regulations; accepts and conforms to standards of conduct and the authority structure of the organization.
22. **Motivation/Initiative.** Exerts the effort needed to attain goals; is determined and persistent; demonstrates a strong work ethic; works hard and does his/her best; proceeds on assignments without waiting to be told what to do; and works diligently without supervision.
23. **Willingness to Learn.** Willingly acquires new skills and knowledge, seeks out and uses feedback to improve performance, learns from experiences, and applies learning to new situations.
24. **Objectivity/Tolerance.** Interacts with people from a diverse population in an unbiased fashion, without letting personal prejudices affect interactions with others.